

Memoir of William W. Warren /

7

MEMOIR OF WILLIAM W. WARREN.

BY J. FLETCHER WILLIAMS, SECRETARY MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

9

MEMOIR OF WILLIAM W. WARREN.

William Whipple Warren , whose work follows, was a descendant of Richard Warren, one of the "Mayflower" pilgrims, who landed at Plymouth in 1620. From this ancestor a large proportion of the persons bearing the name of Warren, in the United States, have descended. General Joseph Warren, who fell at Bunker Hill, was the descendant of a collateral line of the family. Abraham Warren, a descendant of Richard, born September 25, 1747, fought in the Revolutionary War, as did also his son, Stephen., Lyman Warren, son of Abraham, was born in Hartford, Connecticut, May 25, 1771, and was married in Berkshire, Massachusetts, to Mercy Whipple.

Their son, Lyman Marquis Warren, father of the subject of this memoir, was born at the latter place, Aug. 9, 1794. He came to the Lake Superior region in 1818, with his brother Truman A., younger than himself, to engage in the fur trade. The U.S. government having some time before enacted that no one, not a citizen of the United States, should engage in the fur trade, the British subjects, who were engaged in that trade, employed American clerks to take charge of their posts. The Warren brothers entered the service of Michel Cadotte, an old trader among the Ojibways at La Pointe, and soon became great favorites with the Ojibways. In 1821, each of the brothers married a daughter of Cadotte, and in 1823, the latter sold out all his trading outfit to them, and retired from the business. Truman Warren did not live long after this. He died on board a vessel on Lake Superior in 1825, from pneumonia, resulting from the hardship and exposure incident

Library of Congress

to a trader's life. Rev. Alfred Brunson, in his autobiographical reminiscences, entitled "A Western Pioneer," states that "Lyman M. Warren traded for several years in the Lac du Flambeau, Lac Coutereille and Saint Croix Departments, in opposition to the American Fur Company. He then entered into an arrangement with them and took charge of those three departments as partner and chief factor under a salary, making his depot at La Pointe. This arrangement continued until 1834." La Pointe appears to have been his permanent residence until his death.

The Cadottes, into which family the Warren brothers married, were descendants of a Mons. Cadeau, who, it is stated, came to the Ojibway country in 1671, in the train of the French envoy, Sieur de St. Lusson.¹ His son, John Baptiste Cadotte (as the name was then and subsequently spelled) became a trader among the Ojibways, and was engaged for a time with Alexander Henry, who in his work mentions him very frequently. He was married by a Catholic priest to an Ojibway woman of the A-waus-e clan, and made his residence at Sault Ste Marie. Mrs. Cadotte is described by Henry as being a woman of great energy and tact, and force of character. She aided her husband in his trading operations, sometimes undertaking long expeditions with *couruers du bois* for him. She bore him two sons, John Baptiste Cadotte, Jr., and Michel Cadotte, who also became traders among the Ojibways, and were men of energy and ability in their calling. Both of them were well educated and had great influence in the Lake Superior region, and northwest, where they were well

¹ The full name and title of this officer, as given in a document in The Margry Papers, vol. i. p. 96, is Simon-Francis Daumont, Sieur de St. Lusson.

¹¹ known. Both J. B. and Michel Cadotte married Ojibway women, the latter the daughter of White Crane, hereditary chief of La Pointe village. Their descendants are quite numerous, and are scattered throughout the northwest. Michel Cadotte died at La Pointe in 1836, æt. 72 years. Though he had once made large profits in the fur trade and was

Library of Congress

wealthy, he died poor, a result of the usual improvidence which that kind of life engenders, and of his generosity to his Indian relatives.

In 1821, as before remarked, Lyman M. Warren married Mary, daughter of Michel Cadotte. The ceremony was performed by one of the missionaries at Mackinaw. Rev. A. Brunson, in his work before quoted, says of Mrs. Warren: "She was three-fourths Indian. She was an excellent cook, and a neat housekeeper, though she could not speak a word of English." Mrs. Elizabeth T. Ayer, of Belle Prairie, Minn., widow of Rev. Frederic Ayer, the missionary, states that "she was a woman of fine natural abilities, a good mother, though without the advantages of any education. They raised a large family. The children had, added to more than common intelligence, a large amount of *go-ahead-iveness*." Mrs. Warren was a believer in the Catholic faith. Mr. Warren, however, was an adherent of the common evangelical belief, and a member of the Presbyterian Church. Rev. Wm. T. Boutwell, the first missionary at Leech Lake, still living in Washington County, Minnesota, near Stillwater, says: "I knew him as a good Christian man, and as one desirous of giving his children the benefits of a Christian education." Mrs. Ayer says: "He was among the first to invite American missionaries into the region of Lake Superior, and he assisted them as he had opportunity, not only by his influence, but sometimes by his purse. He united with the mission church at Mackinaw, where he was married." Rev. Mr. Brunson, who visited him in 1843, says: "Mr. Warren had a large and select library, an unexpected sight in an Indian country, containing some books that I had never before seen."

After dissolving his connection with the American Fur Company, probably about the year 1838, he removed to the Chippewa River, Wisconsin, where he had been appointed as farmer, blacksmith, and sub-agent to the Ojibways, in that reservation. He located his post at a point a few miles above Chippewa Falls, at a place now known as Chippewa City. Here, in connection with Jean Brunett, he built a saw-mill and opened a farm, which was soon furnished with commodious buildings. His wife died there July 21, 1843, and the following winter he took her remains to La Pointe for interment. Mr. Warren died at La Pointe, Oct. 10, 1847, æt. 53. Of the eight children born to them, two died in infancy.

Library of Congress

Truman A. is now interpreter at White Earth Agency, Minn., and Mary, now Mrs. English, is a teacher at the Red Lake Mission School. Charlotte, Julia, and Sophia are married, and live on White Earth Reservation. Of William, their oldest son, we now propose to give a brief memoir.

William Whipple Warren was born at La Pointe, May 27, 1825. In his very earliest childhood, he learned to talk the Ojibway language, from playing with the Indian children. His father took every means to give him a good English education. Rev. Mr. Boutwell says: "In the winter of 1832, he was a pupil at my Indian School at La Pointe." He subsequently attended, for awhile, the mission school at Mackinaw, when he was only eight years old. In the summer of 1836, his grandfather, Lyman Warren, of New York, visited La Pointe, and on his return home took William with him to Clarkson, New York, where he attended school for two years, and afterwards, from 1838 to 1841, attended the Oneida Institute at Whitesborough, near Utica, a school then in charge of Rev. Beriah Green, a man noted for his anti-slavery views. William remained 13 there until 1841, when he was sixteen years of age, and acquired a good scholastic training. He was then, and always subsequently, greatly devoted to reading, and read everything which he could get, with avidity. "While at school" (says one who knew him well) "he was greatly beloved for his amiable disposition, and genial, happy manners. He was always full of life, cheerfulness, and sociability, and insensibly attracted all who associated with him."

During his absence from home, he had, by disuse, forgotten some of the Ojibway tongue, but soon became again familiar with it, and acquired a remarkable command of it. Speaking it fluently, and being connected with influential families of the tribe, he was always a welcome and petted guest at their lodge-fire circles, and it was here that his taste and fondness for the legends and traditions of the Ojibways were fostered. He speaks in his work of his love for the "lodge stories and legends of my Indian grandfathers, around whose lodge-fires I have passed many a winter evening, listening with parted lips and open ears to their interesting and most forcibly told tales." He was fond, too, of telling to the Indians stories which he had learned in his reading, and would for hours translate to

Library of Congress

them narratives from the Bible, and Arabian Nights, fairy stories, and other tales calculated to interest them. In return for this, they would narrate the legends of their race, and thus he obtained those traditions which he has, with such skill, woven into his book. He was always a great favorite with the Indians, not only on account of his relationship to them, but from his amiable and obliging disposition to them, and his interest in their welfare, being always anxious to help them in any way that he could.

His familiarity with the Ojibway tongue, and his popularity with that people, probably led him to adopt the profession of interpreter. When Rev. Alfred Brunson visited the Indians at La Pointe in the winter of 1842–3, on an embassy from the government, he selected young Warren, then seventeen years of age, as interpreter, and found him very ready and skillful. Hon. Henry M. Rice writes: "In the treaty of Fond du Lac, made by Gen. Isaac Verplank and myself in 1847, William was our interpreter. (See Statutes at Large.) He was one of the most eloquent and fluent speakers I ever heard. The Indians said he understood their language better than themselves. His command of the English language, also, was remarkable—in fact, *musical*."

In the summer of 1842, in his eighteenth year, Mr. Warren was married to Miss Matilda Aitkin, daughter of Wm. A. Aitkin, the well-known Indian trader, who had been educated at the Mackinaw Mission School. It was during his interpretership under I. P. Hays in 1844–45, his relatives say, that his health began to fail. Frequent exposures, long and severe winter expeditions, connected with the Indian service at that time, brought on those lung troubles, which subsequently ended his life so prematurely, after several years of suffering.

Warren came to what is now Minnesota, with his family, in the fall of 1845, first living at Crow Wing and Gull Lake, where he was employed as farmer and interpreter, by Major J. E. Fletcher, Winnebago agent, then also in charge of the Mississippi Ojibways. He was also employed as interpreter in the attempted removal of the Lake Superior Indians under J. S. Watrous—an act which he did not, however, approve of. After a year or two

Library of Congress

he established a home at Two Rivers, now in Morrison Co. In the fall of 1850, he was nominated and elected as a member of the Legislature from the district in which he lived—a district embracing more than one-half the present. area of the State. In January following (1851), he appeared 15 at St. Paul, and took his seat as a member of the House of Representatives. Up to this time he had been quite unknown to the public men and pioneers of the Territory, but by his engaging manners, and frank, candid disposition, soon won a large circle of friends.

Col. D. A. Robertson, of St. Paul, contributes the following reminiscence of Mr. Warren at this period: "I became acquainted with young Warren in the fall of 1850. I had shortly before established in St. Paul 'The Minnesota Democrat' newspaper. At the date mentioned, some one introduced Mr. Warren to me, and wishing to learn what I could regarding the customs, belief, and history of the Ojibways, I questioned him on these points, and he very lucidly and eloquently gave me the desired information. I was much pleased with him, and talked with him a great deal, at that and other times, on the subject. I was amazed at his information in regard to the Ojibway myths, as well as pleased with his style of narrative, so clear and graphic, which, with his musical voice, made his recitals really engrossing. I asked him; 'how did you get these myths?' He replied, from the old men of the tribe, and that he would go considerable distances sometimes to see them—that they always liked to talk with him about those matters, and that he would make notes of the principal points. He said this was a favorite pastime and pursuit of his. He had not at this time, it seems, attempted to write out anything connected, and the matter which he had written down was not much more than notes, or memoranda.

"In January, 1851, Mr. Warren took his seat as a member of the Legislature, and I renewed my talks with him about the Ojibway legends. I then said to him, write me out some articles on this subject, to which he consented, and began to do so during his leisure moments, when not engaged in the Legislature. He had up to that 16 time, probably had little or no practice in writing such things, but soon acquired a good style. The first of his papers, or articles, was printed in the Democrat, Feb. 25, 1851, an article of several

Library of Congress

columns, entitled, 'a brief history of the Ojibways in Minnesota, as obtained from their old men.' This was followed by other chapters during the same year. These sketches took well, and seemed to please all who read them. I finally suggested to him that if he would gather them up, and with the other material which he had, work them into a book, it would sell readily, and possibly secure him some profits. The idea seemed to please him, and I am certain it never occurred to him before. He at once set about it, and from time to time when I saw him during the next two years, he assured me he was making good progress. At this period he was in poor health and much discouraged at times, suffering from occasional hemorrhages, as well as from financial straitness.

"During all my intercourse with Mr. Warren, for two or three years, I never saw the least blemish in his character. His habits were scrupulously correct, and his morals seemed unsullied. He appeared candid and truthful in everything, and of a most amiable disposition. Though about that time he was bitterly assailed by some whose schemes regarding the Indians he had opposed, he never spoke of them with any bitterness, but kindly, gently, and forgivingly. In fact, I never heard him speak ill of any one."

Mr. Warren's widow, now Mrs. Fontaine, of White Earth, states that when he had once set about writing his projected book, he pursued his work with an ardor that rapidly undermined his already feeble health. He read, studied, and wrote early and late, whenever his official duties or absence from home did not prevent, and even when suffering from pain and debility. During this period, a correspondent 17 of "The Minnesota Democrat," who visited Mr. Warren, writes thus under date March 17, 1852:—

"I write you from a most lovely spot, the residence of my friend, Hon. W. W. Warren. Mr. Warren's house stands directly opposite the mouths of the two small rivers which empty into the Mississippi on the western side, a short distance apart, and hence the name, 'Two Rivers.' Opposite this point, in the river, is an island of great beauty of appearance. Near by are countless sugar trees from which, last spring, Mr. Warren manufactured upwards of one thousand pounds of fine sugar. During my short sojourn here, I have been the

Library of Congress

attentive listener to many legendary traditions connected with the Chippewas, which Mr. Warren has, at my request, been kind enough to relate. They have been to me intensely interesting. He appears to be perfectly familiar with the history of these noted Indians from time immemorial ... Their language is his own, and I am informed that he speaks it with even more correctness and precision than they do themselves. This is doubtless true. As I write, he is conversing with Esh-ke-bug-e-coshe, or Flat Mouth, the far-famed old chief of the Pillagers. This old chief and warrior, now 78 years of age, has performed his long journey from Leech Lake, to visit 'his grandson,' as he calls Mr. Warren."

Much interest was felt at this period among Mr. Warren's personal friends, especially among such as had devoted any attention to the study of the Indian races, regarding his proposed publication, and he had the good wishes of all who knew him for its success, as well as their sympathies on account of his health mad his pecuniary straits. In the preparation of his book, also (and he mentions this fact in his preface), he was much embarrassed for want of the works of other authors to' refer to, for there were no public libraries in Minnesota at that time, while his lack 2 18 of means prevented him from purchasing the desired books himself. It is gratifying to be able to state however, that some of his friends who felt an interest in him and his proposed work, generously aided him at this juncture. Among these should be prominently mentioned lion. Henry M. Rice, to whose liberal help is probably owing the completion of the work, and into whose hands it subsequently passed, to be by him ultimately donated to this Society.

In the winter of 1852–53, Mr. Warren completed his manuscript, and in the latter part of the winter, proceeded to New York, in hopes of getting the work published there. He had also another object, to secure medical treatment for his rapidly failing health. In both objects he was doomed to disappointment. The physicians whom he consulted, failed to give him any relief, or but little encouragement, while the publishers to whom he applied would only agree to issue his work on the payment by him of a considerable sum. Believing that some of his friends in Minnesota, who had always expressed an interest in the work, might advance such aid, Mr. Warren resolved to return home and lay the ease before them.

Library of Congress

There is little doubt that had he lived to do so, he would have promptly secured the means required. He reached St. Paul on his way home, in the latter part of May, 1853, very much exhausted. He went to the residence of his sister Charlotte, (Mrs. E. B. Price) and was intending to start for Two Rivers on the morning of June 1. Early on the morning of that day, however, he was attacked with a violent hemorrhage, and in a short time expired. His funeral took place the following day, Rev. E. D. Neill officiating, and the remains were laid to rest in the cemetery at St. Paul.

Thus was untimely cut off, at the early age of 28 years, one who, had his life and health been spared, would have made important contributions to the knowledge which we 19 possess regarding the history, customs, and religion of the aboriginal inhabitants of Minnesota. He had projected at least two other works, as noted in his preface, and it is believed that he had the material, and the familiarity with the subject, to have completed them in a thorough manner.

The news of Mr. Warren's death was received with much sorrow by a large circle of friends, and especially by the Ojibways, to whom he was much endeared, and whom he had always so unselfishly befriended. They had always placed the most implicit confidence in him, and knew that he could be relied on. His generosity in sharing with them anything that he had, was one cause of his straitened circumstances.

His death was noticed by the press with just and appropriate eulogies. A memoir in the Democrat, July 6, 1853, written by the late Wm. H.-Wood, Esq., of Sank Rapids, says:—

“From his kindly and generous nature, he has ever been a favorite, especially with chiefs and old men. He spoke their language with a facility unknown even to themselves, and permitted no opportunity to pass, of learning from the old men of the nation, its history, customs and beliefs. He delighted to listen to their words. Often has the writer of this tribute found him seated at the foot of an old oak, with Flat Mouth, the Pillager chief, noting down upon paper the incidents of the old man's eventful life, as he related them. Having,

Library of Congress

by his steadfast friendship to the Indians, won their confidence, they fully communicated to him, not only the true history of their wars, as seen by themselves, and as learned from tradition, but also that of their peculiar religious beliefs, rites and ceremonies. Perhaps no man in the United States was so well acquainted with the interior life of the Indian, as was Mr. Warren. He studied it long and thoroughly. Investing 20 Indian life with a romance perhaps too little appreciated by less imaginative minds, he devoted himself to the work of preparing and unfolding it, with a poet's enthusiasm.

"Thus animated, he could not be otherwise than enthusiastically attached to the Indians and their interests, and so he was. He was their true friend. While from the treachery of some and the cupidity of others, the Indians were often left with apparently no prospect but sudden destruction, in Mr. Warren they never failed of finding a brother, by whose kinds words of encouragement and sympathy, their hearts were ever gladdened. In his endeavors to contribute to their happiness, he sacrificed all personal interests and convenience, he, with his wife and children, often dividing with them their last morsel of subsistence. With a true philanthropist's heart, he literally went about among them doing good."

Of the four children born to Mr. Warren and his wife, two survive, a son, William Tyler Warren, and a daughter, Mrs. Madeline Uran, both residing on White Earth Reservation, Minn.

He was a firm believer in the truths of the Christian faith, and was a regular' and interested student of the sacred Scriptures. He was accustomed, in his intercourse with the Indians, to enjoin upon them the duty and advantage of accepting the religion taught them by the missionaries, and it is believed that his advice had good effect upon them.

I must not close this imperfectly performed task, without acknowledging my obligations to Hon. H. M. Rice, (Col. D. A. Robertson, Mrs. Elizabeth Ayer, Rev. W.T. Boutwell, and

Library of Congress

especially to Truman A. Warren, of White Earth, and Mrs, Mary C. [Warren] English, of Red Lake, for material and aid kindly furnished me in its preparation.